Two Commonly Abused OTC Drugs
Dextromethorphan and meclizine – do these names ring a bell? Probably not, but they’re likely both in your medicine cabinet right now. You might know them as cough medicine and motion sickness medicine. These two over-the-counter drugs are used to get high more often than all the other OTC’s.

Dextromethorphan, or DXM, is a common ingredient in over-the-counter cough medicine. In fact, it’s found in over 120 different kinds. It relieves coughing when taken as directed, but taking large amounts of DXM can cause hallucinations, dizziness, confusion, vomiting, liver damage and heart attacks. Even worse, if you take DXM with other drugs, you might suffer unknown, unpredictable effects.

DXM seems harmless – it’s found in common OTC drugs like Robitussin, Vick’s Formula 44 and Nyquil. On the street, however, DXM is often called:
- Triple C
- Tussin
- Dex

Meclizine, is found in OTC motion sickness medications that can ease a traveler’s upset stomach. Taking too much of this common ingredient can cause hallucinations, as well as damage to vital organs such as the brain, liver, kidney and stomach.

Meclizine’s hallucinogenic ingredient is usually just called by its brand name, Dramamine. Similarly, sometimes caffeine pills are called No-Doz or Vivarin, although they might actually be made by other brands.

OTC? Not for Me!
Saying “No” to OTC Abuse
What can you do if one of your friends wants you to abuse OTCs? Try one of these ways to tell them “No”.
- “No thanks. I don’t like the taste of cough syrup.”
- “Nah, I’m not in the mood to feel nauseous and jittery today.”
- “I hear that stuff can make you really sick.”

Test Yourself!
Do you know everything there is to know about OTC drugs? Take this quiz and find out!
1. “OTC” stands for ___ medication.
   a. Over-the-counter   b. On-the counter
   c. Over-the-cabinet   d. Out-of-the-cabinet
2. Meclizine is a common ingredient in cough medicine
   a. True   b. False
3. DXM is called ___ on the streets.
   a. Vitamin D   b. Skittles
   c. Dex   d. All of the above
4. Abusing OTCs means not following the label.
   a. True   b. False
5. Caffeine is a drug.
   a. True   b. False

Answers: 1. a; 2. b; 3. d; 4. b; 5. a;
CAffeine Pills: Nervous and Nauseous
Caffeine is everywhere: sodas, coffee, tea, energy drinks and even chocolate. Even though it’s all around us, caffeine is actually a drug. A drug that can send you to the hospital.

For example, here’s what happens when you drink coffee. The caffeine stimulates your nervous system and makes you feel awake and alert. You decide to have another cup…and you end up feeling jittery and sick to your stomach.

Each cup of coffee contains about 100 milligrams of caffeine, and a single caffeine pill contains at least 200 milligrams. So if extra coffee makes you a little jittery, imagine what a couple of concentrated doses of caffeine might do.

Taking caffeine pills is legal, but if you take too many you might experience the following symptoms:

- Nausea
- Delusions
- Chest pains
- Vomiting
- Panic attacks
- Heart palpitations

A Safer High?
The Real Threat of OTC Abuse
Cory was a freshman in high school in Highlands Ranch, Colorado. One Saturday evening, Cory left home to meet his friends at a local movie theater. Unfortunately, he never made it there.

Instead, Cory decided that taking DXM would make the movie more fun. Then he tried to cross a highway on the way to the movie theater. He was hit by two cars and died almost immediately.

The autopsy reported dangerous levels of dextromethorphan, found in an over-the-counter cold medicine, in Cory’s body. His parents found an empty bottle of the drug left in the medicine cabinet.

Still think that abusing OTC drugs is no big deal? Taking too much DXM can cause disorientation, lack of coordination and the poor judgment that made Cory walk out onto a highway.